

Mason County Noxious Weed Control

Aster Family

Canada Thistle

Cirsium arvense

Identification Tips

- Herbaceous perennial that grows 2 to 5 feet tall.
- Leaves are 2 to 7 inches long, deeply lobed with spines along edges, and white hairs on underside.
- Flowers grow in clusters at end of stem and are pink to purple in color. Spineless bracts surround the flower heads.
- Can look similar to other thistles in our area. Canada thistle has smaller flowers and stems lack the spiny wings found on bull thistle.



Biology

- Perennial plant that flowers June to September.
- Plants spread by seed or lateral root growth and new shoots from root buds.
- Horizontal roots may extend 15 feet, and can grow 6-15 feet deep.
- On average one plant produces 1,500 seeds, which can remain viable in soil for over 20 years. Seeds travel by wind or easily attach to clothing and animals.



Eileen Sande, Ferry County NWCB

Canada thistle has pink to purple flowers clustered on a branched stem.

Non-Regulated Class C Noxious Weed: Control Recommended

Impacts

- One plant can form dense patches, colonizing an area 3 to 6 feet in diameter in 1 to 2 years.
- Will invade poorly managed pastures, reducing grazing potential and crop yields. This creates economic problems for farmers.
- Can be a host to insect and plant pathogens.
- Invasive in disturbed areas of wetlands, prairies, and forest edges, reducing habitat and forage for wildlife.

Distribution

- Native to Eurasia, Canada thistle is likely one of the first weeds introduced to the United States by early New England settlers. Settlers blamed its introduction on French Canadian traders, thus coined "Canada" thistle.
- Canada thistle has been found on every continent except Antarctica.
- Often found in areas with disturbed soil such as roadsides, logged areas, and poorly maintained pastures.

QUESTIONS? Contact Mason County Noxious Weed Control at:

(360) 427-9670 ext. 592 or patriciag@co.mason.wa.us

<https://extension.wsu.edu/mason/natural-resources/noxious-weed-program/>

What You Can Do

While there is no legal requirement for controlling Canada thistle in Mason County, the Board recognizes this plant as invasive and is collecting information and providing education on control. The Board encourages and recommends control of existing populations especially in natural lands and forests.

Control Methods

Survey area to identify infestations. Canada thistle is easiest to identify while it is in bloom. Choose one or a combination of control methods suitable for your site. Control should be carried out over several growing seasons to be successful. **Contact Mason County Noxious Weed Control Board for more information.**

Prevention

Look for seeds and Canada thistle seedlings in fill dirt, gravel, nursery plants, and hay. Learn to identify Canada thistle rosettes to help with early identification and control. Survey yours and neighboring properties for Canada thistle. Reseed bare areas in yard and pasture to add competition. To prevent the spread of seed always clean equipment that has been used in an area infested with Canada thistle.

Manual Control

Manual control can be carried out on small infestations, and is easiest with young plants. Take care to remove all roots, as they can re-grow into new plants. **Do not compost flower heads, seeds or roots as plants can produce viable seed after being pulled and re-sprout from rhizomes. Reseed bare areas to add competition and reduce future infestations.** Monitor location for several years and perform followup control when needed.



Eileen Sande,
Ferry County
NWCB

If allowed to go to seed, the flower of Canada thistle will become white and fluffy similar to a dandelion seed head.

Don't confuse Canada thistle with bull thistle.



Photo courtesy of Ben Legler, © 2004

Bull thistle is a non-regulated Class-C noxious weed. It has larger flowers and spiny bracts. Leaf upper surface covered in bristle-like spines, lower surface covered in white hairs. Stems have spiny "wings".

Mechanical

Tillage can be used, but is not the best control method as plants will regrow from root fragments. Tilling must be repeated every 7-28 days for at least 4 months to be effective. Equipment must be cleaned thoroughly to avoid transporting root fragments and seed to new sites.

Mowing can work to delay seed production and weaken plants, but must be repeated regularly to ensure plants are not resprouting.

Chemical

Choose a formulation that is appropriate for your site, taking into account all environmental restrictions. Follow the label exactly as written and use only at rate prescribed. Do not apply herbicide over or near water bodies.

For large infestations of Canada thistle, herbicide can be a good method of control. Keep livestock away from sprayed plants for 1-2 weeks or as directed by label, whichever is longer. A selective or non-selective herbicide will work to treat Canada thistle. Spot treatments with a product containing glyphosate can be used to treat Canada thistle, but non-selective herbicides will affect non-target plants, including grasses. Wait at least three days to cut plants treated with glyphosate. A selective herbicide containing aminopyralid or triclopyr can also be used and will avoid injury to pasture crops. Aminopyralid should be applied to actively growing plants in the spring or fall and triclopyr can be applied while plant is in rosette to bud stage.

